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homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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SUBJECT: "USING LOWER-COST GRADES OF FOOD." Information from marketing specialists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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How to make the best of lower-cost grades of food--that's what many housewives need to know these days. Americans like good food. Good food is traditional with us--part of the American way of living we're fighting for. But good food, wholesome food, nourishing food is not necessarily the most expensive, fancy grade of food. Some foods are expensive because of size and color or other qualities that please the eye, but don't count much in nourishing the body. Some foods are more expensive because they come in fancy packages or are "put up" in novel ways.

In emergency days like these you may need to adjust your habits of buying and cooking in order to feed your family well. You may need to learn how to substitute one kind of food for another with the same food value. You may need to learn how to make best use of the lower-cost grades of food rather than buying the expensive fancy grades.

Let's consider using the lower-cost grades of meat first. Almost any woman--or man--can take a porterhouse steak or sirloin steak or prime or choice or good grade; pop it into a hot broiler or pan; brown it on both sides; turn the heat down a little to finish the cooking; and then have a steak that just "melts in the mouth." It's easy to get good results from an expensive cut of high-grade beef with its fine-textured lean, plenty of high quality fat, and all the marbling that makes it so delicious and tender. High-grade beef is easy to broil or roast to perfection.

But the lower-cost grades--the grades called "commercial" or "utility"--the beef that's not naturally so tender, so rich in fine fat, or so nicely marbled--

this lower-grade beef is definitely not so easy to broil or oven-roast. But the food value is equal to the food value of the more expensive beef, and by adapting your cooking method to it, you can get delicious results. The rule for cooking less tender cuts is to cook slowly with the lid on the pan to hold in moisture. These lower-grade meats make excellent pot roasts and stews with water, or tomato juice, or some other moisture added. And you can make them tender by chopping up for hamburgers, or by pounding to break down the connective tissue. Another way to make meat tender is to let it stand for a few hours in a mixture of oil and an acid like vinegar. The acid softens the tough tissues. The oil gives flavor and tenderness in cooking very lean meat.

And for lower-grade steak, cooking experts of the U. S. Department of Agriculture say braising is an ideal cooking method because porterhouse or sirloin steaks are very lean. Braising is like pot roasting--a combination of browning and steaming. One of their suggestions is "Smothered Steak with Onions." And here are the directions for it: Brown meat on both sides in a little suet or other fat--then remove the meat from the pan. Brown about a quart of sliced onions in the same pan. Then put the steak back in the pan and cover with the onions. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Put a lid on the pan and cook slowly for about 15 minutes.

And if the lean steak is from the round, rump, or chuck, you might use it for a Swiss steak, adding onions during the last half hour of cooking.

Of course you don't have to use onions in the Swiss steak. Lots of us like steak and onions, but don't cook onions with the meat unless the whole family likes 'em. For the meat itself will taste of onion.

Here's the regular way to prepare Swiss steak. Season a thick piece of the lean of beef with salt and pepper. Sprinkle it generously with flour and pound it. Pound it well. This helps to make the meat tender and the flour takes up the juice. Cut the steak for individual servings. Brown these in suet or other fat in a heavy

skillet or kettle. Then add canned tomato juice. (And here you can use the lower-cost grades of tomato juice. U.S. Grade C tomato juice is very suitable for this purpose.) Add enough to cover the meat. You can use water instead of the tomato juice, but the juice adds flavor as well as nutritive value, and the acid helps make the meat tender. Partly cover with a lid and let simmer 2 to 2-1/2 hours -- until the meat is tender enough to cut with a fork.

Mentioning the Grade-C tomato juice makes me think of the many kinds of canned fruits and vegetables with U.S. grades. There are more than 40 different kinds. All of this grade-labeled canned food--whether it's U.S. Grade A, B, or C--is wholesome, all packed in sanitary plants under the scrutiny of inspectors of the Department of Agriculture's Marketing Service.

Using lower-cost grades of canned fruits and vegetables is of course another means of cutting expenses when you need to. No, these aren't so perfect in color, shape and texture as the higher grades, but they're quite as good in a dish where you mix several foods together. Let me explain a little. U.S. Grade A tomatoes, for example, are all whole or almost whole, while in Grade-C the tomatoes are broke up. But surely whole tomatoes aren't necessary for soup. The lower-cost Grade-C pieces of tomato do perfectly well. And Grade-C canned corn is suitable for corn pudding. Grade-C peaches are good for most peach puddings. In general, Grade-C is meant for a dish of combined foods. Of course, if your funds are low, you may serve Grade-C canned fruits or vegetables just as they come from the can. True, Grade-C canned food won't compare in appearance for this type of service with the higher grades, but Grade-C is just as good a food. It's wholesome, and it's just as high in nutritive value as Grade A or B.

That's true for graded eggs, too. The higher grades are best when you want the eggs to stand alone and look their best--maybe for fried or poached eggs. The yolks of higher-grade eggs stand up high and round and are well-centered in the white. And folks say they taste best, too.

But U.S. Standards, or retail Grade B, can be used satisfactorily for all table purposes--when you're cutting expenses. And grade C eggs are entirely suitable for cooking--when you combine the eggs with other foods--in sauces, salad dressings, or in making some of the luncheon dishes such as baked eggs with rice, eggs with creole sauce. You can use Grade C eggs for baked eggs and macaroni. In preparing this, maybe you'd like to add some chopped green pepper to the white sauce just before you pour it over the cooked macaroni and the hard-cooked eggs. That would give more flavor.

As you buy these lower-cost grades, and experiment on your own hook, you'll find many more uses yourself. Just remember that good seasoning and attractive service count a lot when you're cutting expenses, and using the lower-cost grades of food.

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